Title:
Special opening address at the first Anzaas State Conference

SPECIAL OPENING ADDRESS BY THE PREMIER OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA, DON DUNSTAN, AT THE FIRST ANZAAS STATE CONFERENCE - 18/8/75

Thank you for inviting me here this morning to open this First ANZAAS State Conference.

You have chosen to consider in this conference the directions civilization may take over the next twenty-five to thirty years. I think that is a noble and important purpose; but one, in terms of accurate predictions, impossible to achieve.

One of the lessons of the past thirty years is that only the clairvoyant and the gambler can profit from political or social predictions.

In 1945 the nuclear age began, the world was struggling from the morass of near global war. It had ended with both a bang and a whimper, the clamorous roar of Hiroshima and the whimpering of burned children. They remain fixed in human consciousness. 1945 will forever be remembered as the year that man discovered the way completely to annihilate himself.

But in those days, for those sufficiently resilient and before the implications of the bomb sank home, the world by and large appeared to have some hopeful options before it. Both the East and the West believed that the war had proven the capacity of their respective systems, ideological and national to survive. The great cities of Europe were to be rebuilt. Japan was to be made democratic. At Yalta, the Allies had decided on their spheres of influence. The French were moving back into South East Asia. The Dutch were moving back into Indonesia. The English Viceroy of India maintained Imperialism in style. School children were taught to be proud of the British red that on school-room maps indicated the immense extent of Empire, Crown, stability, good manners, the Authorised Version, etcetera.

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Now I could continue this catalogue, but I think the point is made. Few people in 1945 imagined the changes that we have seen occur since then. Space flight; the dissolution of Empire; the independence of Papua-New Guinea; the emergence of an independent and nationalist Africa; the revolution in China; the Vietnam War; computer technology; global-scale pollution. Thirty years ago London had smog, not pollution, and Adelaide was occasionally afflicted by haze.

But if making predictions is a vain and even, perhaps, foolhardy occupation, one must also admit that it is an interesting one. Who knows, one might be right. In some senses George Orwell is now, nine years before the dreaded date.

And so, when I turn my mind to the next thirty years, it is, I am afraid, in an attitude of what can most aptly be described a cautious, and stoic optimism.

I live in a city of, I believe, great attraction, and am involved in its and Australia's political administration. In Adelaide, in South Australia, and generally in Australia, it is possible to enjoy the best fruits of industrial civilization. From this affluent vantage point, it is also possible, providing one charts the course carefully between insurrections, terrorism, and local wars, to visit and enjoy those same fruits in many other parts of the world; though few places are as relatively smog-free and unhassled as Adelaide. Such a position therefore tends to blinker people. It is possible to believe here that the fire next time will not burn here. This is not so. Industrial civilisation is of a piece. And here, we also receive the gargantuan proportions of the complex and almost infinitely interlocking series of problems the human race has before it, and which must be solved if it is to survive.

This argument is now well known: the nuclear and biochemical destructive potential of man has now almost no bounds; speed and communications have contracted the world to a notional area smaller than steam-age England; within that area the world's population is doubling every thirty-three years and massively migrating from rural areas to teeming cities whose cultures are breaking down under the strain; a very small proportion of the world's population (that is, the industrial East and West) is consuming at a huge and exponential rate the planet's unrenewable resources; land, water and air are increasingly poisoned or spoiled by industrial systems whose economies are based on constant expansion; non-industrial (the

third world) systems are working to become industrialised systems; the probability of nuclear accident is approaching statistical certainty.

As scientists and scholars you undoubtedly will see each of these areas - and the whole they represent - not only in the light of your specialities, but also as human beings capable of political action. That is the way I see them too. But my speciality is politics, the actions of which are art, and only the study of which is, allegedly, a science. It is as a politician that I speak today.

As a politician, I have been elected by a popular and secret ballot to a position which gives me, subject to certain important checks and balances, considerable influence in this national society. That is my job: making decisions and taking public responsibility for the running of certain aspects of society. Ideologically, I am a democrat and a socialist.

By democrat I mean not merely that I am a supporter of a system of universal suffrage, the secret ballot, elective legislatures subject to the popular will. I believe that in all aspects of life citizens should have as far as possible an effective say in decisions which affect their lives, and that we cannot separate out governmental activity from all the other human activity in society and apply the democratic principle to the former alone. I do not believe industrial society requires a revolutionary solution to its problems, nor do I believe that it requires some kind of political authoritarianism. Indeed, I believe quite the reverse. At a time when fundamental changes are occurring throughout society, it is essential that we establish or maintain systems that provide the greatest possible degree of free discussion, analysis and criticism within the overall social structure. To do otherwise is to court intellectual and possibly human, disaster. The community as a whole must be in a position properly to sort and sift and categorise and refine the ideas, activities and discoveries of its constituent parts. I believe that, with some inefficiencies, it does this now; this freedom must not die.

Then, when I say I am a socialist, I mean that I believe that an efficient social system should, while providing such political and intellectual freedom, also develop in a way that enables people to live together without being divided into opposing economic classes, and in conditions of approximate social and economic equality. They should, accordingly, then use in common the means that lie to their hands of promoting

the general social welfare and good. The dogma of laissez-faire has bedevilled our society for too long. We still see debates about "public ownership" and "private ownership" in a society where in the processes of production and distribution, ownership is largely divorced from function. In politics the question of ownership, of the indicia of title, is largely irrelevant. The question is, who can do what, with what, and to whom. The question is, where does power lie in the constantly changing patterns of behaviour in our economic activity, and are the wielders of power responsible to those whose lives their decisions delimit. The method of democratic socialism is to get the job done of organising society to have each sector of the economy meeting the social needs of the people without pre-conceived dogma as to the form of organisation - but to ensure that it accords with the democratic principle.

And so it is as a Social-Democratic politician that I speak in an attitude of stoic optimism. The next thirty perilous years will offer little rest for those of us who wish to see human civilization survive. And while it is not possible to predict the events which will determine whether or not it does - whether we enter the twenty-first century intact or irradiated - it is possible now to see, generally, the nature of some of the problems we have before us.

But I would like further to sketch the ideological context in which I speak. Not only do I wear the labels of democrat and socialist, I am also, in terms of fashionable political theory, one of those strange and antique people who hold the firmest opinion that of all the choices before us, the Western parliamentary model of government is that which holds out the most hope for the maintenance and enhancement of mankind's intellectual, social, and creative freedoms, and for his ultimate safety.

Admittedly, it is often a contrary system of Government. It can be long-winded, circuitous, hesitant, cowardly, ignorant, philistine and reactionary. At its worst it is subject to manipulations that make it little more than the legislative machine of an authoritarian elite. At its best, and it is often at its best, it is capable of very fine and necessary social and administrative distinctions and advances. It often dismisses the chiefs of its Executives, and it is constantly on the alert for dirty governmental linen. And, most importantly, it is a system daily subject to immense,

constant and disparate pressures and opinions forcing it constantly to look for a consensus. It can, and often does, act in advance of a consensus, judging that it will follow - but in such cases it always takes a gamble and often loses as a consequence.

Parliamentary systems presently control most of the world's industrial societies. They hold out an example to the world of moderation in the organization of political systems. Without them, and without their symbiotic relationships with public information systems, the people and leaders of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes would have only the relative oppression of oligarchs by which to measure political and intellectual freedom.

But the test of the Western system, and of the intellectual freedom that it allows, is now approaching; if it is not already here. For we now must deal with values, concepts and situations, the nature of which have never been part of the system's expectations or experience. And the essence of the problem will be whether a social consensus can be established quickly enough to allow legislatures and governments to act quickly enough.

For instance, the current debate on the use of resources. Immense imbalances exist between nations and racial groups in the exploitation and use of unrenewable natural resources, and if this continues we will create the most intolerable and uncontrollable political pressures between the developed and undeveloped worlds. Such political pressures will be exacerbated by a world population of near unmanageable proportions, composed in national groups which demand, and expect to receive, the fruits of industrial civilization. And we will have to decide in our system to what extent we re-direct our productive capacity, decreasing our consumption and increasing theirs.

And then there is the debate on the future uses of scientific knowledge. The expansion of knowledge and technique continues at such a rate that world culture possibly does not have time to check and understand the new tools to hand. Already we have, and are developing, the most subtle and refined techniques for the manipulation, surveillance, control or liquidation of societies and groups within societies and individuals within groups. Our capacity for rendering harm to ourselves ranges from what is currently estimated to be an international nuclear stockpile equal to one Hiroshima-size

bomb for each person currently on earth, to ostensibly benign techniques of psycho-surgery and aversion therapy. (One should note in this context that one of the favoured methods in the Soviet Union of disposing of dissidents is to consign them to mental institutions).

In short, as you would all know, in the very near future mankind, and for my purposes, Western Legislatures, will have to make qualitative judgments concerning such developments as the engineering of genes and effects of new psycho-surgical techniques. These will require the most subtle, intelligent, rational and ethical distinctions to be made.

Another area of debate is the environment. Industrial civilization appears, alas, not to be biodegradable. Radioactive wastes have seen to that. It is argued that it will become necessary to embark upon programmes designed to lower consumption, or relate consumption more accurately to renewable energy and material resources. This will, of course, not be as hard on the poor as on the rich. But ultimately, all these areas of debate will concern freedom and its limits within the framework of a pluralist society with a Parliamentary system. For all of the forgoing involves that fundamental consideration - the necessity for the system to provide for openness and the most effective level of debate, dissent and, finally, consensus, at a speed sufficient to make effective decisions.

I have today deliberately not spoken separately of the Australian situation. This is because I do not believe that we are to be isolated from these events, notions and problems. But there are two areas that I would briefly touch on. The first is the rigidity of the Australian Constitution. If our Governments are to respond rapidly to emergent circumstances, the test will be whether our political processes are sufficient to achieve a national consensus for the granting or changing of legislative power. In this sense even now the Central Government has only a limited capacity to control or adjust the national economy, and a certain proportion of the Nation's present economic troubles derives from that situation.

If our political processes cannot achieve consensus sufficient to make Constitutional Change a practical proposition, then it seems to me that Australia could indeed suffer political upheaval with far-reaching effects. The present Constitutional Convention shows no sign of achieving useful change.

The second area I would like to touch on relates to authority relations in Australian Industrial Society. A progressive change in authority relations is already under way. I believe it will gather momentum in the immediate decade or so ahead. It is not uniquely Australian. The change, or the movement for change, is occurring throughout the industrialised world. It reflects the interlocking nature of the various parts of industrial society, and the increasingly expressed desire of people to be involved in the decisions that affect their everyday working lives and environments. Just as the advance of Unionism saw the gradual disappearance of the top-hatted 19th century Capitalist Boss, so is the movement for change in industrial work-authority relations seeing the role of the industrial bureaucrat - and Technocrat Boss - change. This devolutionary process in authority relations and the progressive rejection of pyramidal models of authority can be expected to continue with ever greater reliance being placed on horizontal or interlocking systems of decision-making by groups at various levels in enterprises.

In addition, and simultaneously with this process, I believe we can expect to see the emergence of professional public management officers, trained in economic and business organization and appointed by the community to boards and authorities. These officers will reflect the fact that the productive sections of the community should be subject to oversight by the community, and not be determined by the whims of blind market forces, or the owners of capital. The eventual situation will be private and public boards and authorities in which the community representatives, investor representatives and employee representatives will take an equal hand in controlling enterprises.

I make these predictions on the basis of what can be seen emerging now in political and administrative management processes. Those of you who are from Universities will have observed them also, with the debates concerning examination and assessment procedures and student representation on committees and boards of management. I believe that this movement towards the involvement of people in the basic management of communal, educational, productive and administrative units should be seen as a natural extension of the notion of parliamentary (and hence democratic) responsibility.

And it is I believe another indication of the Western parliamentary system's capacity for survival. Parliamentary notions of debate and dissent - the separation of the executive, judicial and legislative functions - pluralist traditions - all reinforce its general pre-eminence and, I trust, resilience as a system of Government able to encompass and reflect and effect the ideological, intellectual, organizational and administrative changes the new century will certainly demand.

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